

FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS AL ATTIYAH AND BENAVIDES ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Key points:

- The first stage of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF took the field on a loop south of La Rioja stretching for almost 700 km.
- Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing) claimed the car special with just under a minute in hand over Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) and close to four minutes over Sebastián Halpern (X-raid Mini JCW). The Qatari seized the overall lead by 1'06" over the Saudi and 4'19" over the Argentinian.
- Mitchell Guthrie (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) got the better of "Chaleco" López (Red Bull Can-Am Factory) and Seth Quintero (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) in the T3 race. In the overall, Guthrie Jr. has a buffer of 2'39" over the Chilean and 3'23" over his compatriot. Mattias Ekström (South Racing Can-Am) is just outside the podium at 4'12".
- The local hero Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing) took the win in the RallyGP category for pro riders in the W2RC, ahead of Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda). The Argentinian scaled to the top of the W2RC board, where he now leads VBA by 1'08" and Price by 3'16". The top three in the W2RC ranking are already at the business end of the race.
- Michael Docherty (BAS World KTM Racing) cruised to victory in the Rally2 stage ahead of his teammate Bradley Cox and Konrad Dąbrowski (Duust Diverse Rally). Docherty also put clear daylight between himself and the rest of the field in the overall, with fellow South African Cox 5'22" down and the Pole almost 10 minutes off the pace.
- Tomorrow, the second of five stages will take the competitors to Belén, serving up a 121 km road section and a 340 km special.

AL ATTIYAH BY A NOSE

Nasser Al Attiyah was a man with a plan: to start in fourth position, overtake the Overdrive Racing Hilux of Juan Cruz Yacopini and the Mini JCW of Sebastián Halpern and, perhaps, even catch up with Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing), who had chosen to lead the charge in the special. But the plan fell through. While the world champion crew did manage to leapfrog the Toyota in front of them, bad sensations with their rear suspension in the ríos near the start of the special prevented Al Attiyah from pushing as hard as he would have liked to. The Saudi, opening the road, went through one checkpoint after another with a lead of roughly one minute over the factory Hilux. However, at the second-last checkpoint, the tide turned: the Qatari was now about a minute better than Al Rajhi, who had had to ease up because of a slow puncture that he decided to fix during a later neutralisation. Al Attiyah crossed the finish line with 58 seconds in hand over his rival for the world championship. In the overall, Al Attiyah holds the lead in the Desafío Ruta 40 by 1'06", counting the 8 seconds gained in the prologue. Sebastián Halpern, third, is still within striking distance of the two Hiluxes at 4'19" down. The top 3 cars in the championship also make up the provisional podium following stage 1 of the DR40, but a clearer picture has yet to emerge. The four remaining stages will be decisive in the fight for the race and the championship.

In T3, Mitchell Guthrie (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) romped to victory, leaving "Chaleco" López (Red Bull Can-Am Factory) and Seth Quintero (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) in the dust. Two punctures ended up relegating the long-time leader of the special, Mattias Ekström (South Racing Can-Am), to fourth place. In the overall, Guthrie leads "Chaleco" by 2'54", Quintero by 3'41", Ekström by 4'16" and Gutiérrez (Red Bull Can-Am Factory) by 5'05".

LUCIANO BENAVIDES SENDS A SIGNAL

As in the Sonora Rally, Tosha Schareina won the first stage today in the RallyGP category. The Spanish HRC protégé, who joined mid-season, is not yet part of the works team and was not registered for the W2RC at the start of the season, so he is not eligible for championship points. For the W2RC, it was Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing) who came out on top today after a race in which tyre management on the abrasive WRC-style tracks was one of the main challenges. The victor in yesterday's prologue, Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda), was hoping to match Benavides blow for blow and had specifically chosen to start behind him, but he finished just over a minute behind him. Toby Price (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing) played it safe and eased up after noticing that

his rear tyre might not last the distance. He wrapped up the special three minutes down on **Benavides**. As of this evening, the three riders at the summit of the W2RC standings also top the W2RC board in the DR40. Everything is still up in the air on the road to Salta.

Michael Docherty (BAS World KTM Racing) built on a barnstorming performance in the first part of the special, in which he went toe to toe with the RallyGP riders, to claim the Rally2 stage by 5'06" over his teammate **Bradley Cox** and 8'32" over **Konrad Dąbrowski** (Duust Rally Team). **Docherty** took over the reins in the overall, with **Cox** 5'22" down and **Dąbrowski** almost 10 minutes off the pace.

TOMORROW'S STAGE

Stage 2 will set course for Catamarca Province with Belén as its destination. The special will get going on a salt pan (*salar*) before tackling the first sandy area of the race, a section with small dunes and vegetation including camel grass. *Fesh-fesh* will make its appearance in the first part of the special, before Andalgala, which marks the border of Catamarca. The second part of the special will follow a wrecked old road before diving into the rock-strewn *ríos* of south-east Belén with their famous meanders. Navigation errors will be a dime a dozen here. This is where Adrien Van Beveren crashed in stage 10 of the 2018 Dakar. Time bonuses for the riders opening the road —applicable to stages 2, 3 and 4— will also be at stake for the first time.

TOMORROW'S PROGRAMME*:

- Stage 2: La Rioja – Belén
- Total: 461 km
- Road sections: 121 km (114 + 7)
- Special: 340 km
- Special start times:
 - first FIM start: 8:00 am
 - first FIA start: 9:45 am

Follow stage 2 [live HERE](#)

* Local time: GMT -3

Stage 1 results [HERE](#)

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